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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000114

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [CVIS](#) [IZ](#) [AF](#) [SR](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA LEANS FORWARD ON AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ,
CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE KOSOVO DELAY

REF: A. STATE 8983
[1](#)B. STATE 7434
[1](#)C. SENIOR-NORDBERG E-MAIL 1/22/07

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Foreign Minister Kalfin told the Ambassador January 25 that Bulgaria had lifted its caveat regarding night operations in Afghanistan, and that there was political will to lift at least some caveats pending receipt of additional training and equipment. The government expects parliament to approve quickly its plan to send an additional mechanized infantry company to Afghanistan. On Iraq, we informed Kalfin that the diplomatic note regarding the extension of Bulgaria's mission at Camp Ashraf (ref A) would be delivered to the MOD later that day. Kalfin said the exchange of notes would likely be approved by the Council of Ministers at its meeting on February 1 and then submitted to parliament for what he expects will be rapid approval. Kalfin agreed that Kosovo's final status should be resolved without delay, but expressed concern about what he said was EU Enlargement Commissioner Rehn's statement that Ahtisaari would present his plan to the two sides in a piecemeal fashion rather than all at once. He responded positively to our suggestion that Bulgaria host the next meeting of the "Vilnius 10" and said he hoped the newer members of the EU could avoid an "unhealthy competition" for inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program. END SUMMARY.

AFGHANISTAN

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador previewed ref B goals for the January 26 informal NATO ministerial, previously delivered to the MFA at the Director level (ref C). Kalfin, who had clearly been briefed, said he appreciated the USG's long-term approach and the need to combine political, economic and military efforts to defeat the Taliban. He confirmed that Bulgaria planned to send an additional mechanized infantry company -- approximately 120 soldiers -- to Afghanistan. Kalfin said he had spoken recently to MOD Bliznakov and President Parvanov, and that they had agreed to submit the proposal to parliament as soon as possible. His message was clear: parliamentary approval should not be delayed by a discussion of caveats. "We think we can do something on caveats," Kalfin said, but discussions with the MOD were ongoing. MOD sources have told us they expect the additional forces to arrive in Afghanistan in June or July.

[1](#)3. (C) Kalfin said he was arguing within the government for lifting the caveats on Bulgarian forces, but acknowledged that the MOD made a strong case for waiting until the troops could be trained for additional missions and equipped with

armored vehicles. He repeated the MOD's request for expedited delivery of armored HMMWV's requested under the FMF program. He implied however, that the government would do all it could in the meantime, noting that it had recently lifted its prohibition on nighttime operations in Afghanistan. Responding to the Ambassador's point on the importance of explaining the mission to the Bulgarian public, Kalfin said he and others in the government would use the opportunity of the coming parliamentary debate to speak out publicly on the importance of the mission. "We will adopt a very clear stance on the commitment to Afghanistan," he added. Kalfin also noted that the government anticipated that Canada would assist with transportation of an additional 500 tons of Bulgarian arms and ammunition for the ANA. He said the arms and related equipment, including night-vision goggles, had already been inspected by NATO experts. Bulgaria would also consider training some Afghan military personnel in Bulgaria.

IRAQ

¶4. (C) Kalfin was pleased with the news that were about to deliver the requested diplomatic note (ref A) on the terms for extending Bulgaria's mission at Camp Ashraf. He said MOD Bliznakov would submit the exchange of notes to the Council of Ministers for approval at its next meeting on February 1, and the government would pass the agreement to parliament by the middle of February. (N.B. The Bulgarian follow-on force is already being trained and is expected to deploy before the mandate of the current force expires on March 31.) In response to the Ambassador's briefing on the USG's Iraq strategy, Kalfin asked for our assessment of the capacity and

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reliability of the current Iraqi government. Much like PM Stanishev, Kalfin appeared to have been sobered by his visit to Iraq in December. He noted the Maliki government's somewhat contradictory tendency to say that it could do things better than Coalition forces while at the same time using the presence of the Coalition to abjure responsibility. He characterized this trend toward "anti-American populism" as dangerous.

KOSOVO

¶5. (C) Kalfin said he fully agreed with our approach on Kosovo. "If the process is delayed," he said, "we don't know where it will end up." Regrettably, neighboring countries -- Kalfin mentioned Greece and Romania -- were taking a go-slow approach within the EU. The Serbs, for their part, "prefer to talk to states that tell them what they want to hear." Nevertheless, he agreed that it was important for Bulgaria to remain engaged with its neighbor as the process unfolded, and to serve as an example for Belgrade of successful European integration in the Balkans. Kalfin said Kostunica was in no rush to see a government formed, but that he could not drag the process out beyond the middle of May even if he wanted to. For better or worse, "Kosovo will provide the basis for the formation of the government," Kalfin said. In his judgment, it would be better to resolve Kosovo's status before the government is formed. "The most we can hope for is (a new government headed by Tadic's democratic Party) not to oppose it too much." The worst-case scenario would be for Kostunica to form a government with the Radicals, a prospect he said was unlikely could not be entirely ruled out.

¶6. (C) At the January 22 GAERC meeting, Kalfin said that Bulgaria supported the Greek position that the EU should re-open talks with Belgrade on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), but that negotiations could not be concluded until Mladic was rendered to the Hague. This would give Serbia "a clear European perspective" without abandoning ICTY conditionality. Other countries, including France and the Netherlands, argued for stricter

conditionality. Kalfin said the GAERC had also discussed a USD one billion economic package for Serbia, including debt reduction and World Bank loans, and a relaxation of visa requirements. Bulgaria's position was that the EU should develop an economic and political "package" for Serbia, rather than engaging Belgrade piecemeal.

¶17. (C) Kalfin expressed concern about what he said was a statement by EU Enlargement Commissioner Oli Rehn to the effect that Ahtisaari would only present part of his plan to Belgrade and Pristina in the coming days, and that the full plan would be presented later. Kalfin said it would be better to put everything on the table at once, thereby leaving "less room for bargaining." The Ambassador undertook to clarify Ahtisaari's intentions and get back to Kalfin.

VISA WAIVER, VILNIUS-10 MEETING

¶18. (C) Kalfin said he had received an "urgent" call the previous evening from Ambassador Poptodorova in Washington. She had just come from a briefing at the Department on the Visa Waiver Program and was concerned that Central and East European (CEE) neighbors were pitting themselves against each other in an effort to get into the program. Kalfin decried this "unhealthy competition among new EU members" and called on the USG to take a "common, principled approach" toward all countries seeking entry into the VWP. The Ambassador said the discussion of VWP at the January 24 meeting with CEE officials in Prague (on which Kalfin had not yet been briefed) would provide a clear view of the U.S. approach and help curb this competition.

¶19. (C) In closing, the Ambassador suggested that Bulgaria consider hosting the next meeting of "Vilnius 10" political directors in Sofia. Kalfin responded positively, and agreed that energy security should be one of the topics for discussion. We will follow up January 26 with newly-appointed Political Director Valentin Poryazov.
BEYRLE